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## ABSTRACT

This publication replaces the "Guidelines for Middle Schools in Virginia," which were published in 1978-79. The document describes desirable educational practices for early adolescents. It applies to grades 6, 7, and 8 in all Virginia schools, and contains 22 specific recommendations for implementation. Sections describe the recommendations, which set standards for the following areas: (1) students' educational and developmental needs; (2) school organization and structure; (3) connections among culture, society, community, business, and industry; (4) achievement, success, and recognition; (5) specialists, departments, and teams; (6) knowledge and skills across the disciplines; (7) the expanded core curriculum; (8) curriculum electives, student activities, and service; (9) learning rates, styles, types, and levels; (10) instructional grouping and tracking; (11) remediation; (12) scheduling; (13) special education; (14) gifted education; (15) student services--advising, guidance, and counseling; (16) library media services; advising, guidance, and counseling; (16) library media services; (17) articulation and transitions; (18) staffing and staff development; (19) computers and technology; (20) career education and college preparation; (21) students' health and fitness; and (22) dropout prevention. References are included. (LMI)

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# Framework for Education in the Middle School Grades in Virginia

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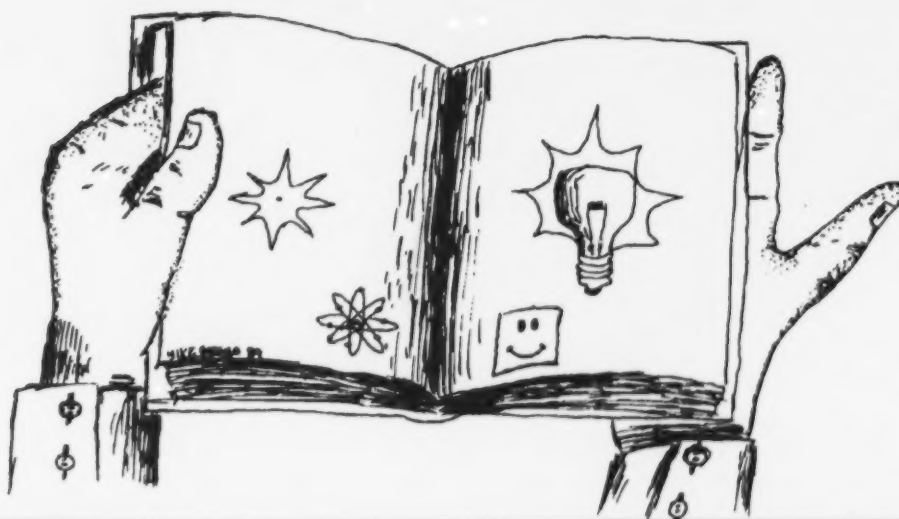
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# FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL GRADES IN VIRGINIA

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## Introduction

This publication revises and replaces the **Guidelines for Middle Schools in Virginia**, which were developed and published in 1978-79. When those **Guidelines** were published, the middle school was an emerging phenomenon, in need of definition and clarification. Now, more than a decade later, Virginia has nearly two hundred middle schools, and many school divisions are in the process of changing to the middle school organization or are refocusing existing middle schools.

Middle school research and literature have increased greatly, giving us more and better information on the best educational practices for early adolescent students. Recognizing this, in November, 1986, the Governor's Commission on Excellence in Education made strong recommendations for restructuring education in the middle school grades. The restructuring process began in the fall of 1988, with the selection of Vanguard Schools, and will continue through 1997.

**All students** in the middle school grades need to develop

performance and problem-solving skills. They need to develop positive attitudes about themselves and others, and toward learning. Students who are at risk of dropping out need to find good reasons, while they are in the middle school grades, to stay in school.

This document describes desirable educational practices for early adolescents. It applies to grades 6, 7, and 8 in all schools in Virginia, and contains twenty-two specific recommendations which can be implemented in every school division where there is a genuine concern that early adolescents receive the best education that can be provided.

As these recommendations are implemented by Virginia's middle schools, today's ambitions will become reality, new research will call for refinements in thought and practice, and more change will be needed. Just as this document revises an earlier publication, it should in turn be revised before the year 2000. Much will happen in this decade, and our middle schools must continue to improve the education of early adolescents and to adapt to social and economic change.

## 1. The Students: Education and Developmental Needs

**The education of early adolescents should be appropriate to their intellectual, physical, emotional and social needs.**

Early adolescence for most children occurs between the ages of eleven and fourteen. It is a distinct developmental stage. Allowing for individual differences, the age group is developmentally different from the earlier stage of childhood and the later stages of adolescence and adulthood. Notable characteristics of early adolescents include: rapid physical growth and sexual maturation; cognitive development and gradual shift from concrete to early formal operations; increased influence of peers; decline in the influence of family; and consolidation of personality.

Most eighth-graders (ages 13-14) are closer developmentally to seventh- than to ninth-grade students. Studies relating to the beginning of the growth spurt and the onset of puberty have shown that for most children, the sixth-grade year (ages 11-12) marks a major developmental advance. Sixth-grade students are developmentally more like seventh than fifth-graders. Thus the logical grade span for the middle school is 6-8.

Middle schools should be organized to take into account the dominant developmental characteristics of early adolescents. Physical characteristics include:

- rapid body growth
- sexual maturation
- change in activity level
- concern for body image
- comfort requirement

Intellectual characteristics include:

- a gradual shift from concrete to early formal reasoning
- varied learning styles and personality types
- distractibility and short attention span
- broad-ranging but often short-lived and unfocused interests
- a present-time orientation which affects the ability to plan and complete tasks

Emotional and social characteristics include the need for:

- strong self-esteem
- understanding of self and feelings
- autonomy and independence

Early adolescents need to be-

come cooperating and contributing members of society, and to relate positively with peers and adults. Interacting with adults outside the usual teacher-learner relationship,

practicing appropriate social behaviors, developing values through instruction and example, and learning to respect different people and cultures should be a part of students' experience in the middle school grades.



## **2. The School: Organization and Structure for Grades 6-8**

**The middle school grades are 6-8. The recommended educational setting for students in these grades is a clearly defined middle school which is different from a high or an elementary school.**

**The recommendations in this document apply to grades 6, 7, and 8 in all schools in Virginia.**

Because sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders are developmentally more alike than different, and because the school must meet the developmental needs of its students in order to educate them successfully, the middle school should comprise the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grades. Schools for early adolescents should differ from elementary and high schools in a number of ways, and should have the characteristics recommended in this document.

Having grades 6, 7, and 8 together in the same building allows for the implementation of a sequential, developmentally based curriculum, and encourages a sound and growing relationship among students, faculty, and parents. Separating the ninth grade from the eighth distinguishes the greater part of course work which leads to high school graduation from the years of transition between elementary school and high school.

In some school divisions, it may not be possible to house the middle school grades together in a separate middle school building. The recommendations in this document for educational organization, structure, curriculum, instruction, and services are applicable to grades 6, 7, and 8 in any building or grade organization.

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## **3. Connections: Culture, Society, Community, Business and Industry**

**Middle schools should contribute positively to the culture, society, and community in which they exist.**

**Middle schools should involve parents and community in the educational process.**

**Middle schools should actively seek involvement in cooperative partnerships with local business and/or industries.**

Schools exist within cultural and social contexts. Two of the most important functions of the school are the delivery of social and cultural learning, and the preparation of students to emerge successfully into their own culture and society. Change in our world and our society has become the norm. Middle schools must respond productively to change, and must teach their students how to deal with and influence change.

Society is becoming more diverse. Students from racial, ethnic, social, and economic minorities must have the same opportunities for success which are available to other students.

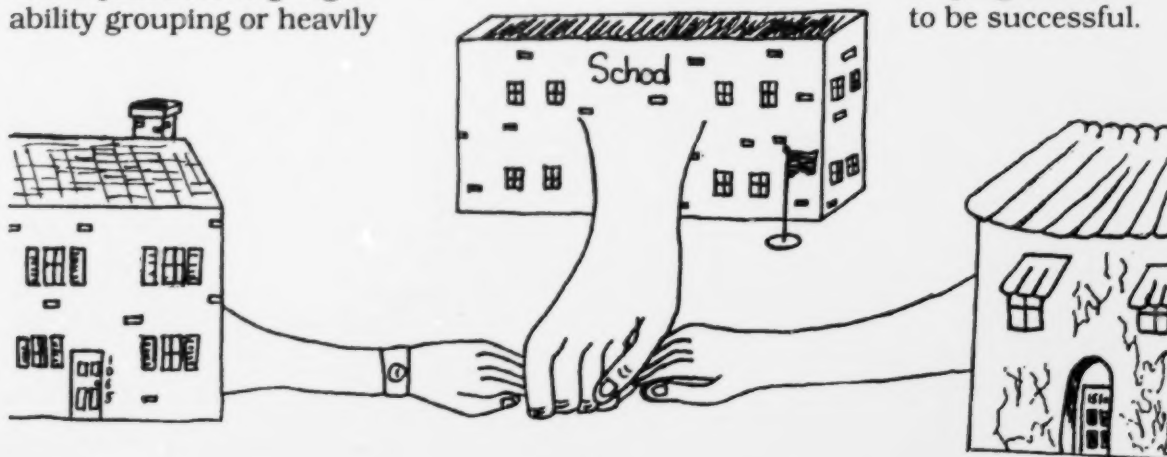
Students should learn the behaviors and values which will make them accepted by society and will give them a basis for success when they continue their education and enter the world of work. Honesty, industry, cooperation, citizenship, diligence, value of self and respect for others should be learned both at home and at school, for they are the foundation upon which our society rests.

**The middle school should seek the best for its students,** educating the school community on what constitutes healthy and appropriate educational practices for early adolescents. In a community where there may be a low regard for education, a depressed economy, racial discrimination, or other undesirable conditions, the middle school should help its students to aspire to rise above local conditions. The middle school should choose and defend what is best for children above inappropriate educational practices (e.g. rigid ability grouping or heavily

competitive interscholastic athletics) which may be demanded by some in the community.

**Middle schools should work closely with their communities and with parents.** The community should be brought into the school, and the school should extend into the community. Volunteers and guests can enrich the instructional program of the middle school. Alliances with community groups can provide important benefits for both members of the partnership. Cooperative involvement of parents and parent organizations with the educational process can enhance the quality of instruction and learning in a middle school.

**Middle schools should seek actively to join with local businesses and industries in partnerships which will be of mutual benefit.** Both schools and businesses or industries may have personnel resources and facilities which can be useful to the other. Many business and industries are vitally interested in the achievement of middle school students, and in their eventual employability and economic productivity. Many are willing to assist schools in helping students to be successful.



#### 4. Climate: Achievement, Success and Recognition

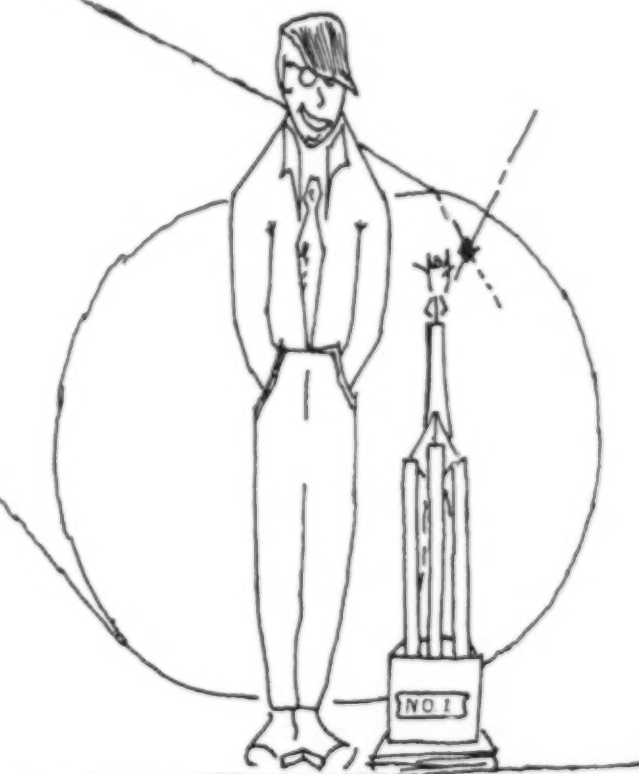
**There should be a positive climate in the middle school, based on the understanding that each student should be a successful learner, and that each person in the school is worthy of recognition and respect.**

Successful schools are characterized by a positive climate, high expectations, direct instruction, appropriate homework, orderly student conduct, and strong instructional leadership. These are the characteristics which enable teachers and students to take learning seriously. Among them, a positive climate for learning is the key and enabling ingredient of success in any school. All students, teachers, and other persons in the school should be recognized as persons of worth.

Achievement should be meaningfully recognized; encouragement should be frequent; and cooperation should be expected. There should be a clear understanding in the middle school that the only acceptable justification for any action or activity is that it will be good for the students. There should be a continuing effort to achieve and maintain the very best climate for learning.

Discipline in the middle school is a process of teaching students responsibility, self-control, and correct behavior. Adults in the middle school should understand that middle school students will have occasional lapses into unacceptable behavior and should react from the point of view of correction and teaching, rather than punishment.

All children should be welcomed and helped to succeed in the middle school. Children who are disadvantaged or from racial or ethnic minorities should have the opportunity to succeed in school, and should be expected to be successful.



## 5. Organization and Structure: Specialists, Departments and Teams

**Instruction for most children in the middle school grades should be from teachers who have specialized knowledge of content in two or more areas.**

**The organization of the school and the orientation of the faculty should reflect a broad concern for the development of the whole child. Interdisciplinary teaming is recommended as the most appropriate organizational plan for middle schools.**

Because of the complexity of subject matter and the need for multiple lesson preparations in the sixth grade and beyond, middle school students should be taught by more than one teacher in the course of a school day. These teachers may have been prepared as elementary, middle school, or secondary subject area teachers. The self-contained classroom model is not appropriate for most children in the middle school grades; neither is a rigidly departmentalized model.

Teachers who work with early adolescents must understand the developmental characteristics of students in the middle school grades. Students should find consistent and coordinated expectations for achievement, quality and quantity of work, and behavior in each of their classes, and with each of their teachers.

Regular coordination among the teachers who work with the same content is essential. Close and frequent coordination is also necessary among all teachers who work with a single child, or with a group of children. The

organization of the school should provide for that coordination. The middle school should be organized to provide:

- a way to reduce for students the apparent size, randomness and anonymity of a large school to the smaller, more secure and more comfortable size of a sub-unit of the school, with consideration given to physical separation by grade level within the building, and staggering the times of class change by grades or teams;

- a focus for belonging and identity, for both students and teachers;

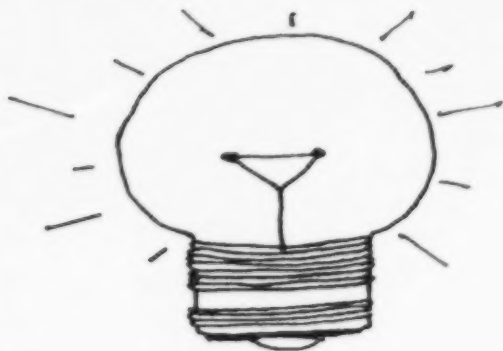
- a structure for the teachers who work with a student or a group of students to plan together, to work collaboratively and to achieve consistency in their expectations; and

- a structure for cooperative decision-making by those who will be expected to implement the decisions.

**Interdisciplinary teaming of teachers** (i.e. common planning time, shared students, coordination of instruction) is an excellent means of achieving the above goals, and for that reason is recommended as the predominant organizational plan for the middle school. Other organizational plans may be acceptable for achieving these goals, particularly in a smaller middle school. Teachers of fine arts, vocational subjects, health/physical education, and other subjects should be included in the team process and experience.

## 6. Curriculum: Knowledge and Skills Across the Disciplines

**Middle school students should acquire and use knowledge productively, and should be helped to understand that much knowledge and many skills span and cross the boundaries of the separate disciplines.**



The middle school years are, for most students, the first exposure to specialized instruction from teachers who have been trained in a discipline. The mathematics teacher teaches mathematics. The agriculture teacher teaches agriculture. The science teacher teaches science. The French teacher teaches French. The English teacher teaches writing and literature. The music teacher teaches choral or instrumental music.

But all of them teach students! There are no clear boundaries between music and mathematics or agriculture or science or literature or French. They connect as knowledge overlaps the disciplines, and as they are learned by a single learner. It is the responsibility of the middle school, although much of its teaching and learning process will be grounded in the separate disciplines, to make the interdisciplinary connections clear and exciting to young learners.

Many skills and concepts overlap the disciplines. Critical thinking and problem solving are not particular to science or English. The understanding and use of technology spans many disciplines. Mathematical skills are used in the natural and social sciences, in vocational areas, and in the fine arts. Reading, writing, and speaking effectively are as critical to success in any class as they are to success in life; they must be the business of every middle school teacher. Skills and content which are common to many disciplines must be taught and reinforced by many teachers.

## 7. Curriculum: The Expanded Core

**All students in the middle school grades should pursue an expanded common core curriculum which emphasizes academic and practical achievement, and appropriate social, physical and emotional growth.**

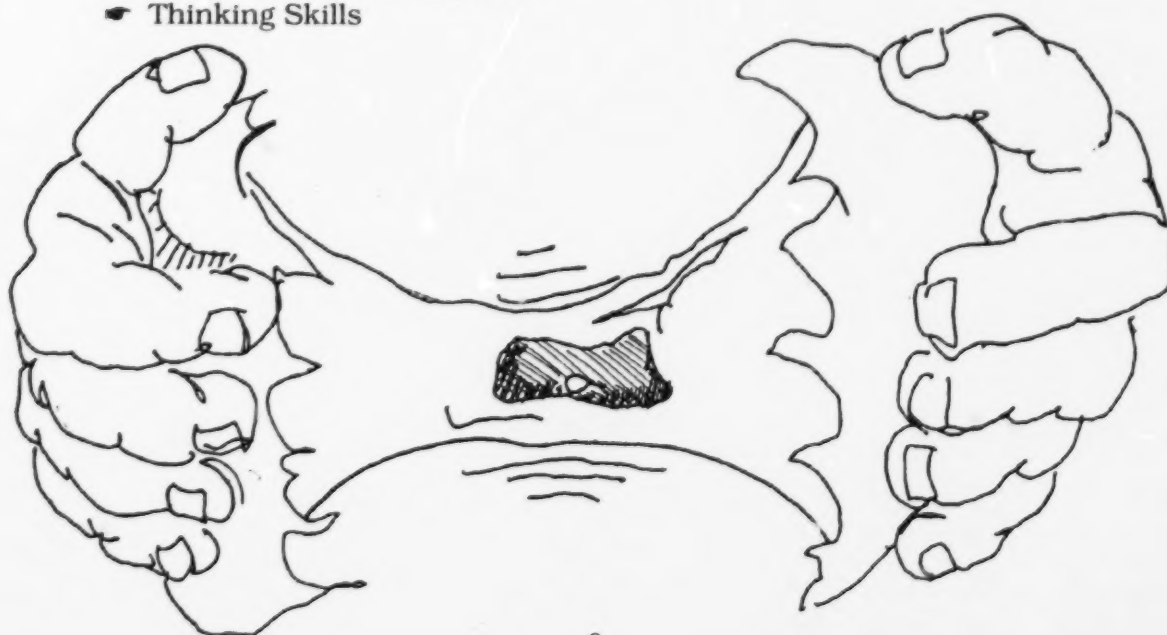
Students in the middle school grades should study a full and balanced range of subjects, including:

- ☛ Language Arts
- ☛ Reading and Literature
- ☛ Mathematics
- ☛ Laboratory Science
- ☛ Social Studies \*
- ☛ Physical Education
- ☛ Health
- ☛ Music
- ☛ Art
- ☛ Foreign Language \*\*
- ☛ Computer Uses in Work and Learning
- ☛ Keyboarding
- ☛ Technological Understanding
- ☛ Vocational and Career Education
- ☛ Study and Test Taking Skills
- ☛ Thinking Skills

The Virginia Standards of Learning for general and vocational education describe the minimum content of the core curriculum for the middle school grades.

*\*The Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia require that World Geography be a part of the middle school Social Studies curriculum. It is most appropriately included in the sixth grade World Communities course.*

*\*\*Level one of a foreign language shall be available to all eighth grade students. Exploratory foreign language offerings are encouraged for students below grade 8.*



### 8. Curriculum: Elective, Activity and Service

**All students in the middle school grades should choose areas of academics, fine arts or vocational studies for exploration, based on their own interests and abilities.**

**All students should be involved in activities which enable them to experience success and social growth, and to be of service to others.**

Elective courses should be available to students at each grade level. These should include courses in academics, fine arts, or vocational studies. All students should have the opportunity to make some choices each year in the interest areas they will explore. Exploration in breadth is preferable to specialization in depth for students in the middle school grades.

Activities should be provided which allow each student to experience positive social interaction and personal success. These might include mini-courses, intramural athletics, academic or other competitions, clubs, publications, performances, and assemblies.

Each middle school student should be involved at least once each year in an activity or a project which requires cooperation and service to others. These might include peer tutoring, assembling of holiday food baskets, community or school clean-up/fix-up projects, etc



Electives, activities, and service are a part of the middle school's curriculum. They are teaching and learning activities which should be scheduled as part of the middle school's instructional time.

When interscholastic athletics or competitions are a part of the middle school program, care must be taken that the level of competition is appropriate to the developmental needs of early adolescents; that provisions are made which encourage maximum student participation; that the intramural program and other activities are not diminished by the demands of an interscholastic program; and that activities are scheduled to avoid interference with instructional time.

## 9. Instruction: Learning Rates, Styles, Types and Levels

**Instruction in the middle school grades should be appropriate to the needs and characteristics of early adolescents.**

All students do not learn at the same rate. Students who learn quickly should receive both accelerated instruction and enrichment. Students who require more time to learn should be taught at a rate which allows for continuous progress and success. They should not be penalized because they do not learn as quickly as their peers.

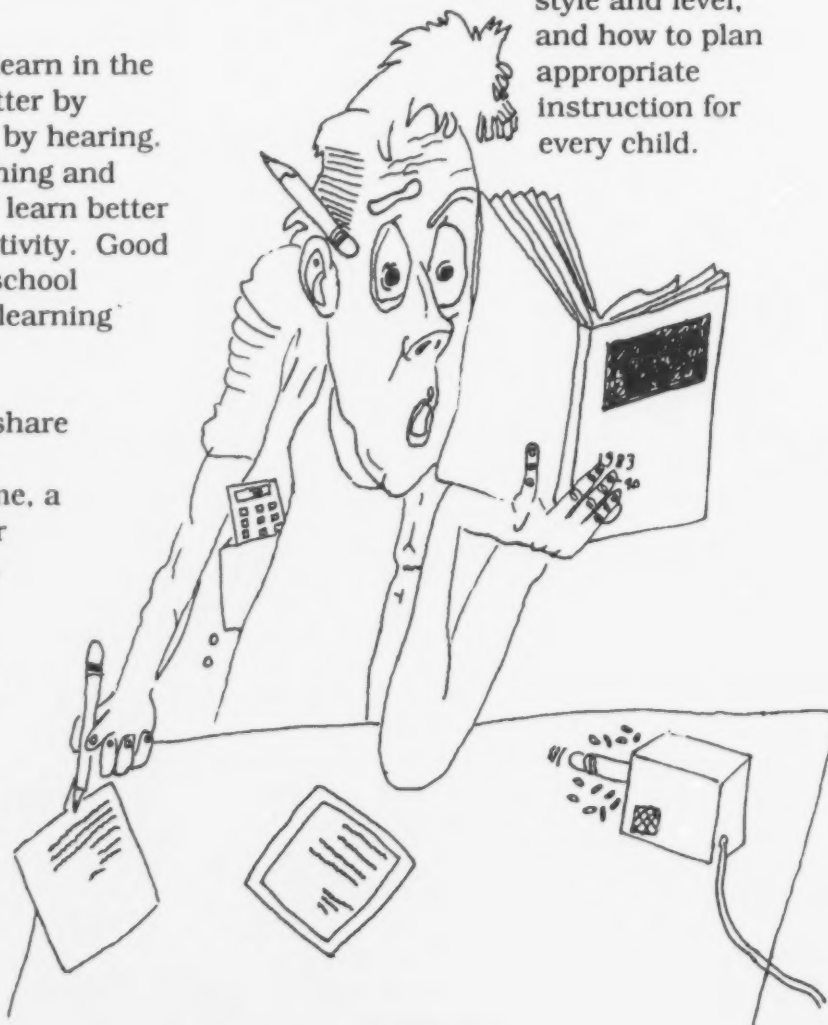
All students do not learn in the same way. Some learn better by seeing. Some learn better by hearing. Some learn better by touching and holding things. And some learn better through movement and activity. Good instruction in the middle school grades should address all learning styles.

All students do not share the same personality type. Learning is a chore for some, a satisfying responsibility for some, and a joy for others. Instruction should be compatible with the learning characteristics of children with differing personality types.

Most middle school students are still concrete learners. Their maturity does not allow them to work effectively with highly conceptual

content or with abstract thought processes such as analogy, hypothesis and deduction, or acceptance of assumptions contrary to fact. Instruction for these students should be rich in experience, demonstration, practice, personal relevance, and reality. If instruction is planned at higher cognitive levels, students should be evaluated first to insure that it will be appropriate.

Teachers should understand how to assess a student's learning style and level, and how to plan appropriate instruction for every child.



## 10. Instruction: Grouping and Tracking

**Grouping in the middle school grades may be homogeneous for reading and mathematics, and for specific programs of instruction for gifted and non-mainstreamed special education. Grouping for instruction in all other areas of the curriculum should be heterogeneous.**

**Middle school students should not be placed in "tracks."**

Except for children with identified giftedness or special needs, and for specific skill-based instruction in reading and in mathematics, there is no research which has identified homogeneous grouping as being more

productive of learning than heterogeneous grouping. Moreover, there is considerable evidence that homogeneous grouping of students who have lower ability results in low achievement and low self-esteem. Grouping in the middle school grades should be predominantly heterogeneous. Heterogeneously grouped classes should be small enough to allow teachers to work effectively with students of varied ability levels.

The practice of "tracking", in which students are inflexibly assigned to fixed sequences of courses, based on some measure of their ability or achievement, should be avoided in the middle school grades.

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## 11. Instruction: Remediation

**A major task of the middle school should be remedial instruction for students who score in the bottom quartile of the Virginia State Assessment Program Tests and for those who do not pass the state's Literacy Passport Tests.**

Remedial programs should focus on raising the overall competence of students in the area(s) to be remediated rather than on acquisition of isolated skills. Except in computation, instruction based on lists of sequential sub-skills is not recommended. Students need to learn skills and to apply them in the context of real reading and writing activities with materials which interest them. The basic skills designated for remediation are major competencies essential both for further learning and for later work

and life. Skills and competencies which are addressed in the process of remediation should be taught, learned, and applied through content which is meaningful to the student.

Remedial instruction should go beyond the techniques used in regular group instruction. A variety of instructional techniques, an increase in the time allocated for instruction, and careful attention to planning and motivation will be critical to the success of any remediation effort for middle school students. Accurate diagnosis, placement, and assessment of students is essential. Information regarding remedial education is available from the Virginia Department of Education, and may be used to plan remedial instruction in the middle school grades.

## 12. Instruction: Scheduling

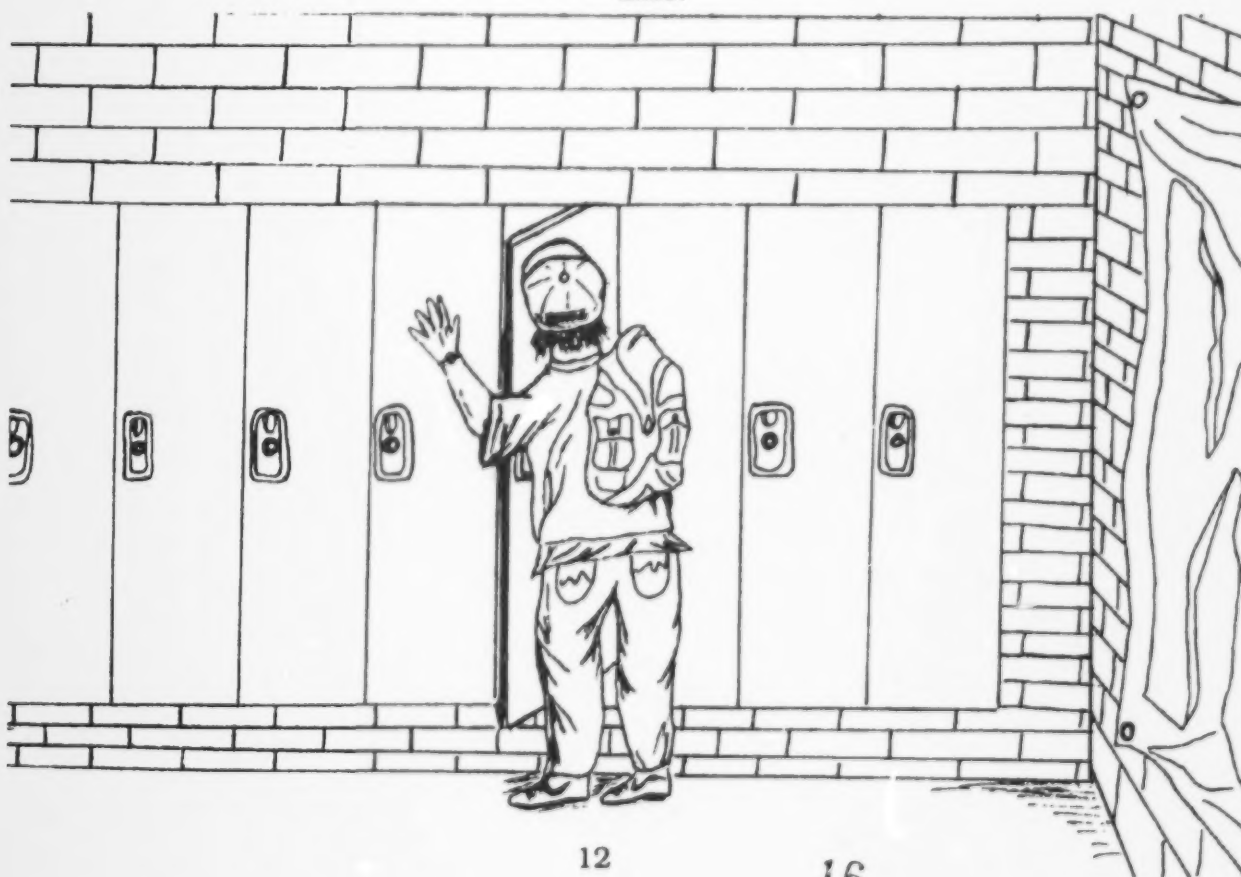
**Scheduling in the middle school grades should allow for flexibility in the delivery of instruction.**

Instructional time is not always allocated best in uniform blocks of 45 or 50 minutes. The teaching of reading and language arts may require more time than most other subjects. Some subjects need not be taught every day. Instructional time should be allocated according to the needs of the students and the nature of the content, rather than on a fixed and unvarying schedule.

**Schedules** which allocate a common time block to teams of teachers rather than a fixed period-by-period

allocation of time to subjects are recommended. Modifications or deviations from a schedule should occur as necessary for laboratory activities, discussions, invited speakers, etc.

Because most students learn and most teachers teach better at one time of the day than another, flexible scheduling should be used to change occasionally the order and time of day when subjects are taught, and to reduce the disadvantage of regularly scheduling a subject at a less than optimum time for a student or a teacher. Flexibility in scheduling is most easily achieved by teachers working in teams in a common block of time.



### 13. Special Education

**Special education in the middle school must be in accordance with federal and state regulations, and with the program recommendations of the Virginia Department of Education.**

The middle school should house programs for most exceptionalities. Handicapped students must be placed in the least restrictive environment to the greatest extent possible. General and vocational education teachers

should be trained in the nature of handicapping conditions and provided support in modifying teaching techniques to meet the needs of students. Handicapped students should receive as much experience in the vocational areas as possible to help them to begin to make the transition to the world of work. Social skills should be developed through instruction and interaction with non-handicapped peers.

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### 14. Gifted Education

**Gifted education in the middle school grades must be conducted according to state regulations and the local school division's plan for educating gifted students, as approved by the Virginia Department of Education**

Students who have been identified as gifted should receive differentiated instruction in their identified areas of giftedness. Full-time programs for gifted students may be provided when there is sufficient enrollment.

Grouping gifted students in special classes with a differentiated curriculum or (where there are only a few identified students to be served) cluster grouping in a heterogeneous classroom with differentiated curriculum and instruction are appropriate ways of meeting the needs of the gifted.

Additional administrative arrangements may include: multi-grade grouping, resource programs, special enrichment, mentorships, and/or acceleration. The benefits of grouping gifted students for all or part of the school day and offering a differentiated curriculum include higher achievement, increased motivation, and improved self-esteem.



## 15. Student Services: Advising, Guidance and Counseling

**Each student in a middle school should be known well and advised by at least one adult who works in that school.**

**The guidance program should be appropriate to the developmental characteristics and needs of early adolescents**

The rapid physical and psychosocial growth which early adolescents experience, the multitude of choices which they must make, and the growing demands of school and life make it necessary that there be trusted and caring adults who can advise, guide and counsel them. School counselors trained to work with early adolescents should collaborate with other faculty to provide guidance and counseling services to individuals and to groups. The counselor should work with students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

The middle school should be organized to provide for each student's being known well by at least one adult.

In the relationship between the student and the adult (a teacher, counselor, administrator, or classified employee), the student may receive recognition, acceptance, encouragement, advice, and modeling of appropriate social behavior. An advisor-advisee program, in which most of the adults in the school meet regularly with a small group of their advisees, is an excellent way of ensuring that there is such a relationship, and that each student is known well by one adult in the school.

The monographs A Guide for Planning and Developing Guidance and Counseling Programs in Virginia's Public Schools (1983), Career Guidance and Counseling (1984), Counseling with Handicapped Students (1985) and Counseling with Gifted Students (1986) are available from the Guidance Service of the Virginia Department of Education. Guidance and counseling in middle schools should conform to the recommendations contained in those publications.

Counselors in a middle school should be trained to work with early adolescents, and should be competent in traditional counseling skills. The guidance professional has responsibility for managing the guidance program, which should be an integral part of the school involving all faculty, and for providing direct service to students, parents, teachers, and others. These services include counseling, both for individuals and for groups; consulting with the adults who live and work with early adolescents; coordinating services for students; and providing information through a guidance program.



## 16. Library Media Services

**The library media program is an essential component in the middle school.**

The library media center is the ideal setting for integrating each aspect of the middle school's curriculum. Library media programs in the middle school should provide an environment for interdisciplinary and individualized instruction. Instruction in library media information skills will enable students to develop abilities, find facts, weigh evidence, draw conclusions, and determine values. The library media program's activities should provide the student opportunities to participate in a wide range of learning activities and should promote lifelong reading. A flexible schedule of operation should open access to the media center and its resources, while supporting a variety of instructional approaches.

Individual differences of middle school students can be met through the use of a variety of media, employing various technologies. Videotapes, slides, CD-ROM, video disk and electronic information storage sources are only a few types of media which can be used. When teachers make effective use of these media, several small groups or individuals can simultaneously study the same topic on several different levels of difficulty. These activities can simultaneously encourage and satisfy curiosity, and inspire subsequent learning. Students should have an opportunity to participate in groups, independent

reading, and research projects which promote self-esteem and responsibility. These activities can also be used to develop a variety of creative and leisure time activities, and to encourage students to pursue individual interests.

The library media specialist in the middle school should function as an administrator, a resource specialist, and an instructional consultant. As an instructional team member, the library media specialist will be involved in the personal and skill development of students, and will plan cooperatively with team teachers and other instructional specialists to provide learning resources which will promote optimum learning. Working closely



with counselors, the library media specialist can help students to develop a greater understanding of themselves and of the challenges which they will face. And, under the library media specialist's supervision, students can interact productively in groups, and practice appropriate behaviors with their peers.

## **17. Articulation and Transitions**

**The middle school years should be a time of smooth transition from the elementary school to the high school. Students in the middle school grades should move through a broadening continuum of instruction and structure that takes them from the self-contained elementary classroom to the six-or-seven period day which is typically the high school experience.**

From the feeder school, there should be full continuity of information on the student's achievement and developmental needs; a thorough orientation to the receiving middle school; and a reception into an environment not greatly different from the elementary school. For example, a sixth-grade student might best be placed with a team of only two or three teachers for core subjects.

Within the middle school, the structure and expectations should not remain static. Just as the curriculum should be increasingly challenging as the student ages and grows in knowledge and skills, the structure of experience should broaden and allow

for increasing individual development as the student matures. Eighth-grade students, for example, might be assigned to teams of four or five teachers, should have more responsibilities and broader privileges than younger students, and should receive more challenging instruction. Continuity of information and a thorough orientation to the next grade should accompany a student's year-to-year progress through the middle school.

A smooth transition to high school is necessary. Continuity of information, complete orientation of students and parents, and moving to a structure in the ninth grade which is not greatly different from the eighth-grade experience are critical elements of a smooth transition.

**Students** entering the ninth-grade should have received specific instruction in the study skills which they will need for academic success. Care should be taken that, in trying to promote a smooth transition to the ninth-grade, the student is not over-challenged or under-supported in the eighth-grade year.

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## **18. Staffing and Staff Development**

**All professional personnel should be appropriately endorsed for their assignments.**

**The principal should have strong qualities of leadership and a thorough understanding of early adolescents and middle grades curriculum.**

**Staff development should be a regular function of the middle school.**

All professional personnel in a middle school should be qualified, on the basis of experience and training, to work with early adolescent students. While the Middle Education (4-8) endorsement is desirable for many

teachers who work in the middle grades because it combines specialized training with broad preparation, it should not be considered the only or necessarily the best endorsement for all middle school teachers. Every attempt should be made to match closely teachers' qualifications and the requirements of their teaching assignments. Principals and counselors in middle schools must have the appropriate middle grades endorsement.

Teachers, principals, and counselors who excel in middle school assignments should be encouraged to remain in middle schools. The work of improving and restructuring Virginia's middle schools should be done by those who have the vision and the experience to do it best.

Whatever the level of pre-service preparation and prior experience, there is a continuing need for all educators in the middle school grades to understand their students better, to improve instructional skills, and to monitor the effectiveness of instruction. Planned and systematic staff development activities should be conducted regularly, and should be repeated periodically.

Staff development may be provided by faculty, administration, division-level staff, outside consultants, or college and university faculty. Staff development which originates within the school and which has continuing support and reinforcement can be very effective. Whenever possible, teachers should assume leadership roles in identifying needs, and in designing and implementing staff development activities in collaboration with those who do the training.

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## 19. Computers and Technology: Understanding and Use

**Middle school students and their teachers should use computers as learning tools in the daily activities of teaching and learning.**

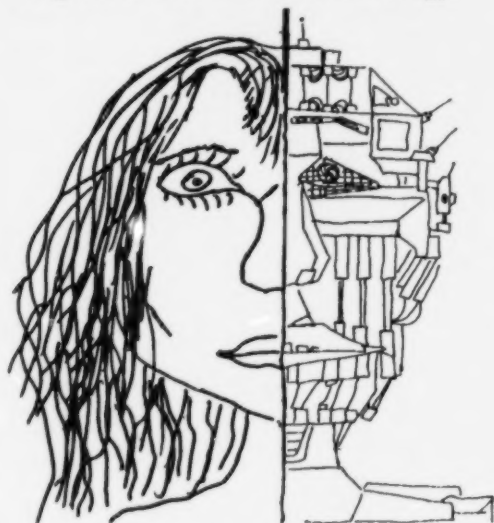
**Middle school students and their teachers should develop a basic understanding of educational technology and acquire the skills necessary to use technology to improve teaching and learning.**

Computers and other technologies are used routinely in the processing of data and information, and in thousands of specific commercial, industrial, academic,

military, and scientific applications. Students in the middle school grades have unique educational needs which may be addressed with computers and other technologies. In the middle school environment students, especially those who are at-risk or potential dropouts, should demonstrate what they learn, using materials and equipment for multisensory learning. Students need to have first-hand experience in using instructional applications of computers. Skills in keyboarding, use of computers in the writing process, and use of computers in all instructional areas are essential for middle school students.

Computers have a special place in the instruction of students who have experienced difficulty in learning. They are powerful instructional tools in motivating students to master basic skills. The computers purchased through the Governor's Technology Initiative and placed in all sixth grade programs should provide intensive remediation in reading, writing, and mathematics.

Teachers in middle schools need to be comfortable with using instructional technology. Each teacher who works with students in the middle school grades should be technology-



literate and should be provided with microcomputers, instructional television, audiovisual, and other newer technologies for teaching and instructional management. It is a statewide goal that all teachers in the middle school grades receive at least 16 hours of in-service training in instructional applications of microcomputers by 1992, and ongoing training in the use of other technology programs developed and funded by the Department of Education.

Technology which did not exist when our eighth grade students were born is now in everyday use. Our world and our lives are increasingly linked by complex technology which we and our students understand only in the most limited way. All students need to be familiar with the technology which touches almost every aspect of their lives. Many of our middle school students, later in their lives, will have to learn to design, operate, or repair highly technological equipment and to work comfortably with technological processes. For all of these reasons, students should begin to gain a basic understanding of technology in the middle school grades.

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## 20. Looking Ahead: Career Education and College Preparation

**Middle school students and their parents must be helped to look ahead and to prepare for the future. Career education should be infused into the middle school curriculum. College orientation and preparation should begin in the middle school grades.**

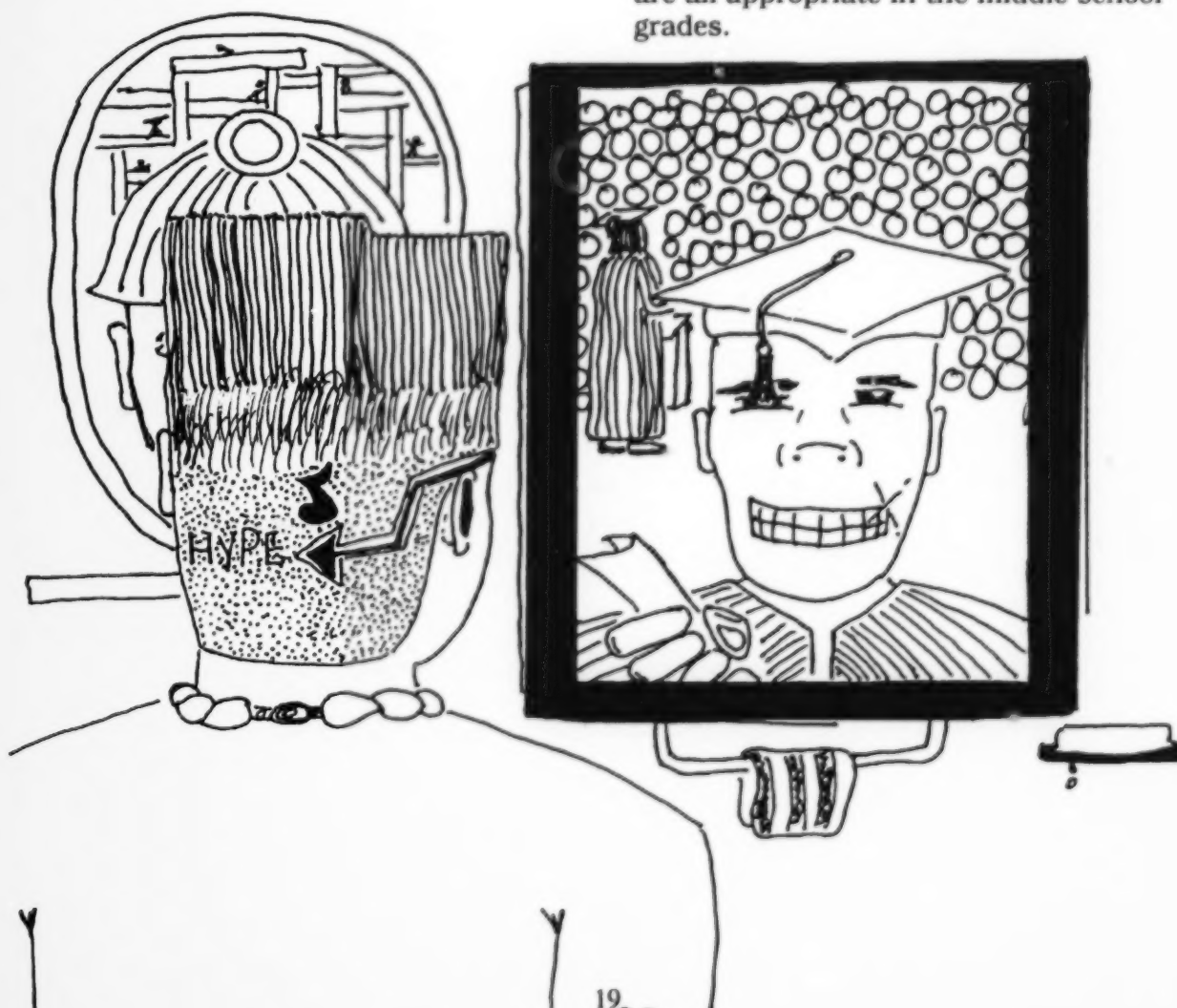
Middle school students need to visualize themselves in careers, and should learn about each of the occupational clusters so they can begin to make informed decisions in narrowing their career choices. A collaborative effort among teachers, counselors, administrators and community can help students to see future career

options. Career education should be infused into the content of each course and activity in the middle school.

There should also be an emphasis on students' acquiring strong basic skills, desirable work habits, positive self-concept, ability to get along with others, and skills in decision-making. Career education in the middle school can be enhanced by special activities such as career fairs, job shadowing, and community visits. Students should have an opportunity to learn about work and careers

directly from men and women in their community who are employed in a variety of occupations.

Middle school students should be encouraged to continue their education through and beyond high school graduation. Disadvantaged and minority students, who are under-represented in Virginia's colleges and universities, should receive special encouragement to begin preparing themselves for higher education. Counseling, special awareness activities, and special programs oriented to higher education for disadvantaged and minority students are all appropriate in the middle school grades.



## 21. Students' Health and Fitness

**Students must be healthy in order to be successful learners. The school should seek to ensure that all students have access to needed health services.**

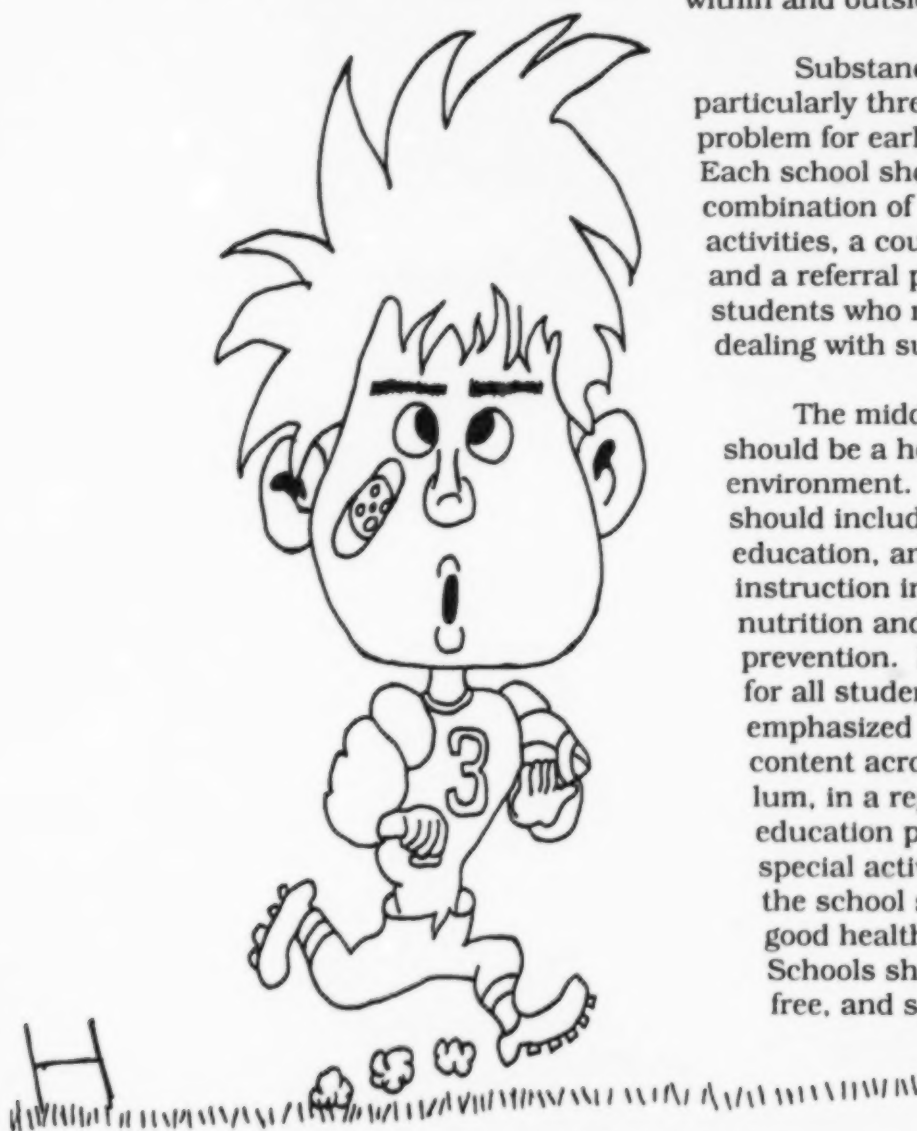
**The school should be a health-promoting environment.**

Students in the middle school grades must be physically and men-

tally healthy in order to be successful learners. Teachers and other school personnel should know the indicators of potential or actual health problems, and should be able to refer students who need services. Possible providers of public and private health services in the should be identified. Simple procedures should used for referral. Students' health needs should be met by a combination of health services within and outside of the school.

Substance abuse is a particularly threatening health problem for early adolescents. Each school should have a combination of preventive activities, a counseling program, and a referral procedure for students who need assistance in dealing with substance abuse.

The middle school itself should be a health-promoting environment. The curriculum should include health education, and specific instruction in the areas of nutrition and substance abuse prevention. Health and fitness for all students should be emphasized in instructional content across the curriculum, in a regular physical education program, and in special activities. Adults in the school should model good health and fitness. Schools should be smoke-free, and safe from violence.



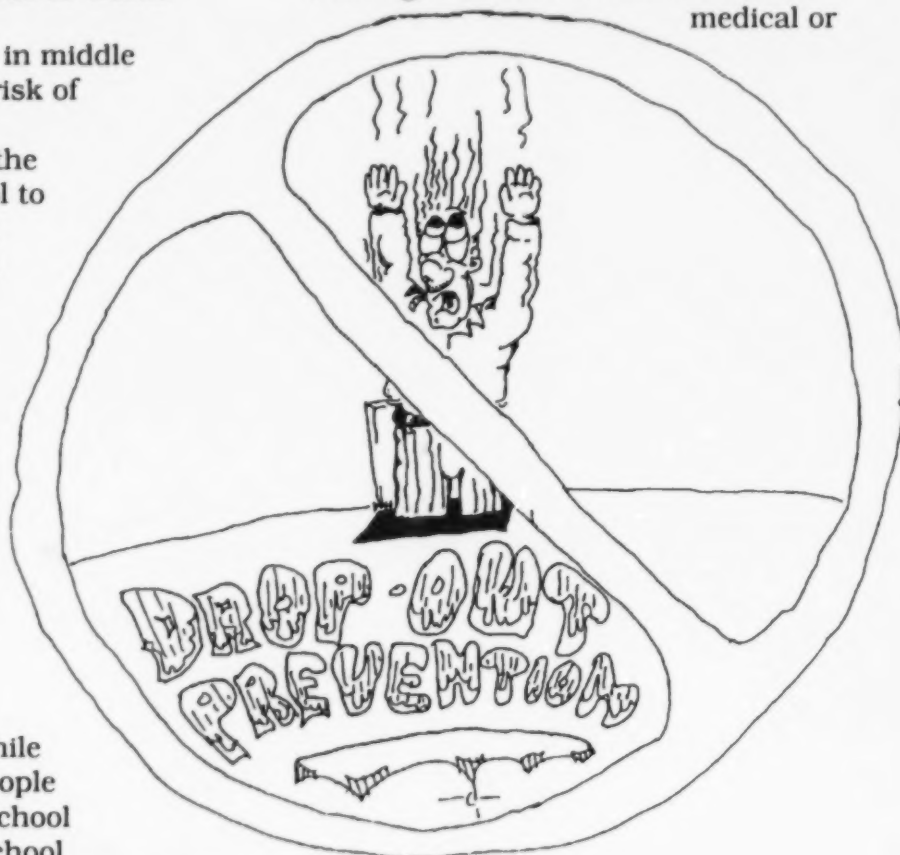
## 22. Students at Risk: Dropout Prevention

**Students who are at risk must receive extra help in the middle school grades in order to complete school, and to make a successful transition from school to work.**

Many students in middle school grades are at risk of school failure, of not successfully making the transition from school to work, or of becoming ultimately dependent on society for their support. They may be at risk due to conditions which they can not control (poverty, cultural or linguistic difference, family difficulties, illness, etc.), and/or due to their own behaviors (low achievement, disruption, truancy, parenthood, etc.). While few of these young people actually drop out of school while in the middle school grades, many begin to experience the frustrations and disappointments in the middle school grades (and earlier) which cause them to drop out after reaching high school.

Middle school students who are at risk need extra help and attention if they are to succeed in school and in life. They should be identified early, and given the assistance they need to be successful. No single approach or program is successful with all students

who are at risk. All need encouragement, advising, and counseling. Many need tutoring or remediation. Some need employment or employment training, and others need referral to medical or



mental health services. Alternative education programs are needed for students who have not been successful in regular middle school programs.

Middle schools can play a major role in the reduction of dropouts in Virginia. Experiences in the middle school grades will greatly influence at-risk students' chances for success in school and in life.

## 23. References: Tools for Improvement

The annotated list of references below is not a comprehensive bibliography on the middle school grades. It is a selection from the best and most appropriate literature, research and sources for educational improvement at the middle level. The books, articles, and publications should be read by every middle school principal, and should be easily accessible to all counselors and teachers in every middle school's professional library.

A difficulty with any bibliography is that it is out of date as soon as one new article or book is published. This one is no exception. This list of references will be updated periodically. Copies of the revised list, and references to additional resources may be obtained from the Associate Director for Middle Schools, Virginia Department of Education.

### Publications

Alexander, William M., and Paul S. George, **The Exemplary Middle School**. New York: Holt Rinehart Winston, 1981. This is one of the standard texts on middle school education, covering the basics of rationale, curriculum, instruction, and organization in an unusually comprehensive way.

Alexander, William M., and C. Kenneth McEwin, **Schools in the Middle: Status and Progress**. Columbus, Ohio: National Middle School Association, 1989. The result of a national survey, this report describes and quantifies the implementation of middle school practices such as teaming, advising, exploration, and interdisciplinary curriculum and varied instruction.

Atwell, Nancie, **In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents**. Portsmouth, N.H: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1987. A description by a master teacher of a proven method for actively involving early adolescents in their writing and reading.

Bybee, Roger, and Robert B. Sund, **Piaget for Educators**, 2nd ed. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1982. This is an excellent overview of Piaget's theories of cognitive development.

California State Department of Education, **Caught in the Middle: Educational Reform for Young Adolescents in California's Public Schools: Report of the Superintendent's Middle Grade Task Force**. Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1987. This is California's blueprint for middle school reform. It is comprehensive, specific, and ambitious.

**Clearing House**, monthly. Heldref Publications, Washington, D. C. This journal publishes material of interest to middle level and high school teachers and administrators. Topics of articles include useful practices and research findings.

Cole, Claire G., **Guidance in the Middle Schools: Everyone's Responsibility**. Columbus, OH, 1988. A guidance program is described which is based on the nature and needs of early adolescents.

Davidson, Judith, and David Koppenhaver, **Adolescent Literacy: What Works and Why**. New York: Garland Publishing, 1988. (Available from the Center for Early Adolescence) The authors describe five successful programs which have increased adolescents' literacy, and identify common elements of all programs which have contributed to their success.

Fuhrmann, Barbara, **Adolescence, Adolescents**. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1986. This is a comprehensive text on adolescent development.

George, Paul S. and Lynn L. Oldaker, **Evidence for the Middle School**. Columbus, OH.: National Middle School Association, 1985. George and Oldaker establish a research basis for the team organization in the middle school, and describe the ideal climate for learning in the middle school grades.

Golay, Keith, **Learning Patterns and Temperament Styles**. Newport Beach, CA: MANAS-SYSTEMS, 1982. In this book the author draws heavily on David Keirsey's and Isabel Briggs Myers' work on personality types, and relates that work to classroom teaching and learning situations.

Guild, Pat Burke, and Stephen Garger, **Marching to Different Drummers**. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1985. The authors summarize a number of approaches to the learning styles, and suggest instructional applications.

James, Michael, **Advisor - Advisee Programs: Why, What and How**. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association, 1986. The author describes the basis in research for advisor-advisee programs, and then explains how to establish and maintain them.

Johnson, Mauritz, ed., **Toward Adolescence: The Middle School Years** (Seventy-ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. This is a collection of articles by a number of authorities on middle grades education. The article by Donald Eichhorn, "The School," is a classic. Many others, on such diverse topics as family, cognition, juvenile justice, and moral development are valuable contributions to the understanding of early adolescents.

Johnston, J. Howard, and Glenn C. Markle, **What Research Says to the Middle Level Practitioner**. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association, 1986. This is a collection of the authors' **Middle School Journal** articles in which they reviewed research on such topics as ability grouping, classroom management, critical thinking, and attitude development.

Lipsitz, Joan S., **Growing Up Forgotten: A Review of Research and Programs Concerning Early Adolescence**. Lexington, MA: Heath, 1977. This work addresses the biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional development of young adolescents. Lipsitz found that social institutions and the research community were not giving enough attention to this age group.

Lipsitz, Joan S., **Successful Schools for Early Adolescents**. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984. (Available from the Center for Early Adolescence). In this book Lipsitz develops general principles for excellence in middle grades education, and presents case studies of four schools, all quite different, which achieved excellence.

Merenbloom, Elliott, **The Team Process in the Middle School: A Handbook for Teachers**. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association, 1986. This describes teaming of teachers, and gives a number of practical suggestions on how to make teaming effective. There is an excellent section on scheduling.

**Middle School Journal**, quarterly, available from National Middle School Association. This publication has timely articles and reviews.

National Association of Secondary School Principals, **An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level**. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1985. This is a statement of desired characteristics for all middle level schools.

Oakes, Jeannie, **Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality**. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985. The author describes the effects of tracking and homogeneous grouping

**Restructuring Education in the Middle School Grades**. Richmond, VA: Virginia Department of Education, 1989.

"Special Report on Middle Schools." Baltimore: Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, June, 1987. This is a summary of several longer research reports which focus on questions of classroom organization and grouping for instruction.

**Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century.** Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (Carnegie Corporation of New York), 1989. The report of a national task force which has recommended the implementation of a number of practices in middle schools which are also recommended in this document.

Wiles, Jon and Joseph Bondi, **The Essential Middle School.** Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1981. Another standard text on middle school education, this book has excellent sections on planning, implementing, and organizing the middle school.

### **Publishers and Centers**

Center for Early Adolescence, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Suite 223, Carr Mill Mall, Carrboro, NC, 27510 (919) 966-1148

Center for Research On Elementary and Middle Schools, The Johns Hopkins University, 3505 N. Charles Street, Baltimore, Md., 21218 (301) 338-7570

Center of Education for the Young Adolescent, 128 Doudna Hall, University of Wisconsin -- Platteville, 1 University Plaza, Platteville, WI, 53818 (608) 342-1276

National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091 (703) 860-0200

National Resource Center for Middle Grades Education, College of Education, EDU 115, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33820 (813) 974-2530

National Middle School Association, 4807 Evanswood Drive, Columbus, OH 43229 (614) 848-8211

## **Acknowledgements**

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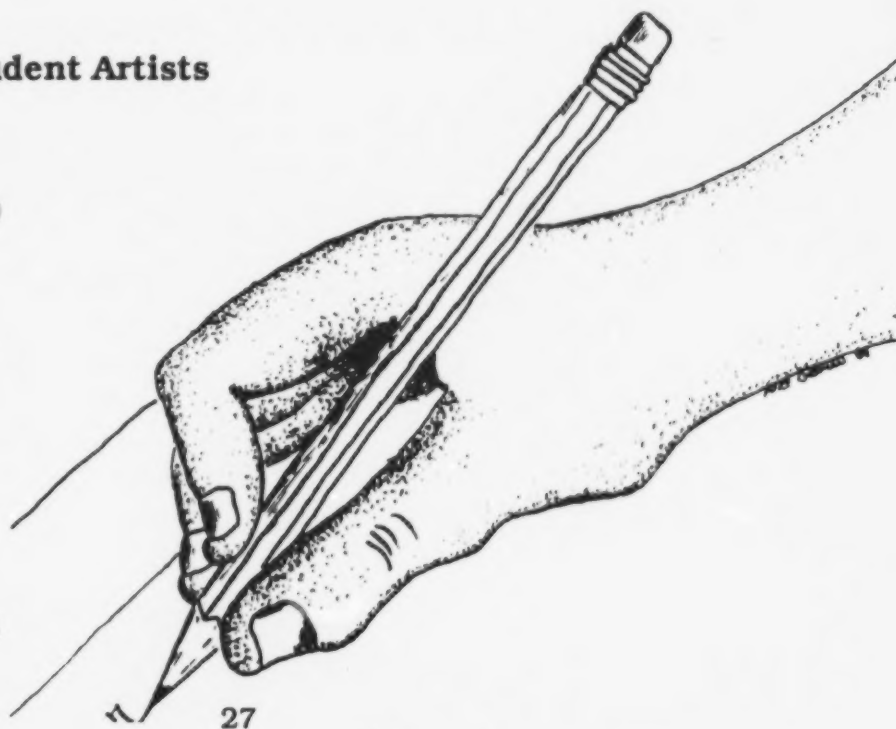
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